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Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean

Summary record of the 457th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 10 July 2017, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Perera (Sri Lanka)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chair** declared open the 2017 session of the Ad Hoc Committee.

Election of officers

2. **The Chair** said that, although the former Vice-Chairs of the Committee, representing Mozambique and Indonesia, and the former Rapporteur of the Committee, representing Madagascar, had returned to their capitals, he had been informed that the delegations of those countries wished to put forward Mr. Da Costa (Mozambique), Mr. Bawazir (Indonesia) and Ms. Raharimboahangy (Madagascar) to replace them. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to dispense with the nomination of candidates and to elect them by acclamation.

3. *Mr. Da Costa (Mozambique) and Mr. Bawazir (Indonesia) were elected Vice-Chairs, and Ms. Raharimboahangy (Madagascar) was elected Rapporteur, by acclamation.*

Adoption of the agenda (A/AC.159/L.147)

4. *The agenda was adopted.*

Report of the Chair of the Committee pursuant to paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 70/22

5. **The Chair** said that the Indian Ocean region, a historical centre of maritime trade, played a critical role in maintaining security and sustainable economic growth in littoral and hinterland States and was characterized by remarkable economic, linguistic and cultural diversity. While geopolitical realities had changed since the Cold War era in which the Committee had been established, its mandate to ensure peace, security and economic growth in the region remained relevant in light of new threats such as terrorism and piracy by non-State actors, human trafficking, drug smuggling, arms trafficking, marine pollution, climate change and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities.

6. Informal consultations with Member States had revealed that many were of the view that the core mandate of the Committee remained relevant. There was a broad sense that the new areas of concern must be taken into account in the future work of the Committee, including through a possible review of its mandate. Maritime safety and security was a key area, given the importance of the Indian Ocean for trade, and thus economic development, in the region. Organizations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association were viewed as being of particular importance in enhancing cooperation in that area. Indeed, Member States had considered that the Committee could provide a forum for the Association to contribute to discussions within the United Nations system on a broad range of issues, including the blue economy. In that connection, he recalled preambular paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 70/22, in which the Assembly noted the initiatives undertaken by countries of the Indian Ocean region to promote regional cooperation.

7. The outcome of the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development had highlighted the critical importance of preserving oceans and the marine environment for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in view of the dire condition of the world's oceans. The creation of a sustainable ocean economy, the development of new blue industries such as offshore renewable energy, the use of marine technologies and the implementation of regenerative processes to combat climate change would help to promote the economic progress and stability needed to accelerate environmental improvement and ensure international peace and security. Environmental interconnectivity could also provide opportunities for peacekeeping, peacemaking and development that would greatly benefit the region. He encouraged Member States to engage in deliberations on the Committee's future work through a consensual approach.

8. To help guide the future work of the Committee, Member States must consider whether there was a need to review its mandate to take into account current global threats, challenges and opportunities in the Indian Ocean region; and whether, given the importance of ensuring adequate time and flexibility for discussions on the possible review of the Committee's mandate, it was necessary to submit a draft resolution on the implementation of the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace for consideration at the seventy-second session of the General Assembly.

9. **Ms. Bird** (Australia) said that the Indian Ocean was a major conduit for the trade of goods and energy between Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. While the Committee's core function of promoting the peace and security of the Indian Ocean region remained relevant, its mandate should be reviewed to reflect the current environment, in particular the challenges posed by non-traditional security threats,

and the collective vision of States of the Indian Ocean area for a rules-based region.

10. The Indian Ocean Rim Association, which had been established in 1997 as the region's only ministerial-level forum dedicated to promoting regional cooperation, peace and economic development, required significant strengthening in order to keep pace with the Indian Ocean's increasing strategic importance. The Association had nevertheless made great strides under the chairmanship of India, Australia and Indonesia in improving cooperation, while promoting peace and prosperity, within a rules-based order. For example, Indonesia had successfully raised the Association's international profile by hosting the Indian Ocean Rim Association Leaders' Summit held in Jakarta in March 2017, which had resulted in the adoption of the Jakarta Concord and the Declaration on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Those documents complemented the Committee's mandate and provided opportunities for collaboration and mutual reinforcement of the objectives of the States of the Indian Ocean region. In particular, the Jakarta Concord contained a reference to the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace and other issues of strategic concern to the Committee; included commitments to ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight in the region in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea; emphasized respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; and called for strengthening regional cooperation to address non-traditional security threats. Moreover, the Association, which now had observer status in the General Assembly, could collaborate with the Committee in tackling security challenges, including by exploring options for operationalizing the principles contained in the Declaration on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Both the Association and the Committee must revitalize their work and strengthen their collaboration in order to ensure their continued relevance.

11. **Mr. Bayyapu** (India) said that, with a coastline of more than 7,500 kilometres and over 1,000 islands, India had a long-standing maritime trading tradition and attached great importance to ensuring peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region. As the world's third largest ocean, surrounded by some 70,000 kilometres of shoreline, the Indian Ocean had become increasingly important for international trade, with nearly 65 per cent of oil trade being conducted across its sea lanes.

12. In recent years, there had been increased cooperation among States of the Indian Ocean region in countering the threat of piracy and providing humanitarian assistance following natural disasters. In addition, the importance of marine conservation and the sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development had been highlighted at the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

13. Maritime security was crucial for pursuing activities and research related to the maintenance of a sustainable blue economy. In that regard, India had collaborated with several of its maritime neighbours on initiatives to promote maritime boat security and the blue economy and had actively participated in the work of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, including the recent Leaders' Summit. It looked forward to further expansion of regional cooperation in such areas as renewable energy, the blue economy, maritime safety and security, ocean research. It also looked forward to other institutional exchanges.

14. **Mr. Habib** (Indonesia) said that the vision set forth in the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace remained essential for promoting regional resilience and stability. As a nation whose territory largely consisted of water, Indonesia understood the critical importance of maintaining maritime peace and security. In addition to being a lifeline of international trade and transport, the Indian Ocean was a source of livelihood for nearly two billion people representing broad ethnic, demographic, economic, religious, political and cultural diversity.

15. Given the role of the Indian Ocean in fostering global interconnectedness, instability in the Indian Ocean region would affect countries both within and beyond the region, in particular those States that relied on the Indian Ocean as a major sea lane. A multilateral approach was required to tackle the current multidimensional and cross-border threats that afflicted the region, in particular marine conservation challenges resulting from overfishing. Efforts must also be made to address the issue of human trafficking for labour exploitation in the fishing industry, a transnational organized crime that violated international law, as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing practices.

16. The current threats facing the region had been recognized by regional organizations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association, which had adopted a plan of action for 2017-2021 that focused on economic sectors as well as maritime safety and security. The Association continued to experience growth in terms of the scope of its work, its membership and its dialogue

partners, which included several permanent members of the Security Council. His delegation was in favour of promoting greater interaction between the Association and the Committee.

17. Global awareness of the critical importance of safeguarding oceans and promoting shared environmental ownership had increased, as demonstrated by the 1,393 voluntary commitments undertaken by participants in the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14. Lastly, Indonesia agreed on the need to review the Committee's mandate to reflect current global threats and challenges.

18. **Mr. Iliichev** (Russian Federation) said that his country attached great importance to cooperation with States of the Indian Ocean region and stood ready to engage in productive multilateral and bilateral work to make the Indian Ocean basin a zone of peace, stability and good neighbourliness. Achieving that goal and contributing to maritime security in the region, including through anti-piracy efforts, had been established as long-term commitments in the maritime doctrine adopted by his country in 2015.

19. Unfortunately, the ability of the Committee to work effectively continued to be hindered by seemingly insurmountable challenges. While the Russian Federation understood the desire of some States to shift the emphasis of the Committee's work to other priority issues for regional cooperation, his delegation wished to caution against mission creep into the disarmament mandate of the First Committee. The Russian Federation was committed to cooperating with other Committee members in pursuit of sensible compromises with a view to reaching consensual decisions. His delegation appreciated the non-confrontational approach taken by the delegation of Sri Lanka throughout its chairmanship of the Committee.

20. **Mr. Yu** Peng (China) said that his delegation supported the efforts of the States of the Indian Ocean area to defend their sovereignty and independence, as well as peace, security and stability in the region. The Declaration should be implemented at an early date, which would require joint efforts by States both within and beyond the region. All permanent members of the Security Council and the main maritime users of the Indian Ocean should participate in the Committee's work. Major Powers outside the region should eliminate their military presence in the Indian Ocean area and refrain from threatening or interfering in the affairs of States in the region. His delegation would continue to support dialogue between the Chair and the relevant States. China would carefully consider the recommendation to review the Committee's mandate and stood ready to engage with other Committee members on that issue.

21. **Mr. Kazi** (Bangladesh) said that the Indian Ocean contributed significantly to security, interconnectedness, peace and security in the region, in addition to facilitating the spread of globalization by serving as a transit route for container ships, bulk cargo vessels and oil shipments. His country had participated actively in the work of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, including the recent Leaders' Summit, where the Prime Minister of Bangladesh had reaffirmed her Government's commitment to making the Indian Ocean a zone of peace. In that connection, he took note of the recommendations to review the Committee's mandate and strengthen its interaction with the Association. He also took note of the recommendation made with respect to the submission of a draft resolution on the implementation of the Declaration at the seventy-second session of the General Assembly and sought further guidance as to how the Committee might proceed in that regard. He would transmit those matters to his capital for consideration and looked forward to engaging in the informal consultations on the future work of the Committee to be conducted by the Chair.

22. **Mr. Ammar** (Pakistan) said that his delegation sought further information as to how the Committee might proceed in determining the need for the submission of a draft resolution on the implementation of the Declaration at the seventy-second session of the General Assembly. He would also like to know how the informal consultations referred to in paragraph 11 of the draft report of the Committee (A/AC.159/L.148) would be conducted. In addition, he requested that Committee members should be given the opportunity to transmit the matter of the review of the Committee's mandate to their capitals following the conclusion of the current meeting. In formulating its own views, Pakistan would consider the need to expand the focus of the Committee beyond disarmament.

23. **The Chair**, taking note of the comments made by Member States, said that he would recommend an amendment under section C of the draft report of the Committee (A/AC.159/L.148) to reflect the content of its deliberations at the current meeting. The amendment would then be circulated to all members of the Committee for further consideration.

Adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its seventy-second session (A/AC.159/L.148)

24. **Ms. Raharimboahangy** (Madagascar), Rapporteur, introducing the draft report of the Committee (A/AC.159/L.148), explained that paragraphs 3 and 7 would be completed to reflect the statements made at the current meeting.

Paragraphs 1 to 10

25. *Paragraphs 1 to 10 were adopted.*

Paragraph 11

26. **The Chair** suggested that, since it was not possible for the Committee to take a decision on the potential revision to the mandate at the current meeting, the following text could be added as a new paragraph 12: "The Committee decided that its mandate (based on the 1971 Declaration on the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace) should be revised and updated to reflect current realities and convergent interest in the region. It decided that the Chair would undertake further consultations and make a proposal to the Committee in that regard, which would be taken up by the Committee at its next session. The above proposal will, after consideration by the Bureau of the ad hoc Committee, be communicated to Member States for their consideration."

27. **Mr. Yu** Peng (China) said that use of the word "decided" in the first sentence of the Chair's proposed insertion was problematic, as several delegations had made it clear that they needed more time to consider the potential revision of the mandate. He therefore suggested amending the new paragraph to read "Some members of the Committee made proposals concerning the revision and updating of the mandate of the Committee."

28. **Mr. Ammar** (Pakistan) said that a number of different views had been expressed on the matter of the revision and updating of the mandate, and in any case there were too few Committee members present to conduct a valid vote. His delegation did not object to the language proposed by the delegation of China. An alternative option would be to replace the paragraph proposed by the Chair with the words "The Committee decided that the Chair would undertake further consultations and make a proposal to the Committee with regard to the renewal of its mandate (based on the 1971 Declaration on the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace) to reflect current realities and convergent interest in the region, which would be taken up by the Committee at its next session."

29. **The Chair** suggested that the paragraph could read "The Chair proposed that the mandate of the Committee (based on the 1971 Declaration on the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace) could be revised and updated to reflect current realities and convergent interests in the region. The Committee decided that the Chair should undertake further consultations and make a proposal to the Committee in that regard, which would be taken up by the Committee at its next session."

30. **Mr. Hansen** (Australia) said that his delegation would favour the Chair's latest suggested wording.

31. **Mr. Kazi** (Bangladesh) said that his delegation also supported the wording suggested by the Chair. In future, the Chair should organize informal meetings involving all Committee members on important matters such as changes to the mandate, in order to enable an open exchange of views between all members of the Committee.

32. **The Chair** said that the concern expressed by the representative of Bangladesh was addressed in paragraph 11 of the draft report.

33. **Mr. Ammar** (Pakistan) said that his delegation would support the language proposed by the Chair. He asked whether the Committee took decisions on the basis of consensus or voting.

34. **The Chair** said that in practice decisions had usually been consensus-based, but the rules of procedure required only a simple majority. However, there were too few members present to constitute a simple majority.

35. **Mr. Kazi** (Bangladesh) proposed inserting the phrase "with the members of the Committee" after the words "undertake further consultations" in the new paragraph, to ensure that the consultation process was inclusive.

36. **Mr. Ammar** (Pakistan) suggested that a phrase such as "provided that there is a consensus in the Committee" should be inserted after the words "could be revised".

37. **Mr. Yu** Peng (China) said that any changes to the mandate should be discussed by the First Committee, and asked whether that would happen.

38. **Ms. Giles** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the report of the Ad Hoc Committee would be submitted to the First Committee, which could choose to discuss it.

39. **Mr. Yu** Peng (China) said that the work of the Ad Hoc Committee concerned peace and security and

therefore merited consideration by the First Committee. He hoped that the First Committee would consider and adopt relevant resolutions submitted by the Ad Hoc Committee.

40. **Mr. Kazi** (Bangladesh) suggested that the proposed new paragraph could replace paragraph 11, rather than being inserted as a new paragraph 12.

41. *It was so decided.*

42. *Paragraph 11, as orally amended, was adopted.*

Paragraphs 12 to 14

43. *Paragraphs 12 to 14 were adopted.*

44. *Draft report A/AC.159/L.148 as a whole, as orally amended, was adopted.*

Closure of the session

45. **The Chair** declared closed the 2017 session of the Ad Hoc Committee.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.